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## FOLK-LORE SCRAP-BOOK.

CONJURING AND CONJURE-DOCTORS IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES.—The "Southern Workman and Hampton School Record," Hampton, Va., for November and December, 1895, contains an article on this subject by Miss Herron and Miss A. M. Bacon, the study being founded on compositions of students at the Hampton School. As this account gives extended and reliable information concerning Afro-American witchcraft, it is here reproduced *in extenso*.

"It is difficult here to make any classification of the things used in conjuring which will have any value except as a mere arbitrary distinction for the sake of ease in enumerating and remembering in some intelligible order the great variety of media for the charms cited by the authors of the compositions from which our data are drawn. We will, however, for the sake of convenience, classify into

(1) Poisons.

(2) Charms.

"Of poisons derived from substances known or believed to be poisonous and administered in food or drink a number of cases are cited. A drink of whiskey is poisoned and offered to the victim; an apple is poisoned and given in church on Sunday. One instance is given of 'toad heads, scorpion heads, hair, nine pins and needles baked in a cake and given to a child who became deathly sick.' By another of our writers it is said that 'some go in the woods and get lizards and little ground-dogs and snakes and dry them and then powder them all up together in liquor and give them to drink, or pick a chance and put in their food so they can eat it.' Another case is mentioned of a conjurer who caught a snake, cut his head off, hung him up by his tail and let the blood drop into a can. Then he went out and caught a lizard, killed him, took his blood and mixed it with the snake's blood. This mixture was done up in a bundle and sent to the victim. He drank it up, and in two minutes was lying on the floor speechless. In this case the victim was saved by an old doctor who was brought in and rubbed him about twelve hours. One woman swallowed a lizard in a cup of coffee and was poisoned thereby. In another case cabbage, presumably poisoned, was given to the victim with evil results. Again, horsehair is put into the food or a preparation of poisonous snakes and lizards is mixed with the whiskey. The theory in regard to the poisonous effects of hair is thus stated by a boy whose own hair had been baked in bread and given him to eat. The conjure-doctor told him that if he had eaten it the hair would cling round his heart strings and would have afflicted him so that he would not be able to work and after a while it would kill him. It required no belief in the supernatural whatever to make one afraid of persons whose business it is to devise poisons to place in the food of their victims, and, if the evidence of our collection of compositions is to be trusted, there was on the plantations in the old days a vast amount of just that sort of thing. That the poison did not always produce the desired effect was due rather

to a lack of knowledge than to a lack of zeal on the part of the conjurer, and if roots and herbs, snakes and lizards, hairs, and other disgusting objects could be worked into the food and drink of the victim it was undoubtedly the most certain way of dispatching the business to the satisfaction of his enemy. But this method of revenge, because it was the most direct and certain, was the most easily discovered, and we find that other methods seem to have been more popular. Just as poisoning is less direct and therefore safer than clubbing or shooting, so 'fixing' by means of a charm is safer than either, and charms seem to have been relied on for working evil, to a very great extent.

"The form of the charm which comes most near to the simple poisoning, of which we have already given examples, is the passing of the spell to the victim by handing to him some conjured article or placing it where he can pick it up. In these examples it is contact alone that transmits the evil; the charmed or poisoned thing need not be eaten. A sweet potato on a stump in the victim's potato patch has been known to cause pain just as soon as it was touched by the one for whom it was intended. A woman, picking up chips, picked up a small bundle folded in rags; the next chip stuck to her hand and she was conjured. A pair of new shoes just come from the shoemaker causes such pain that the victim cannot walk. He continues to grow weaker and thinner and to suffer even after the shoes are removed and at last dies of the effect of conjured shoes. A bottle of cologne presented to a girl by her unsuccessful rival puts her eyes out when she smells of it. Something put on the gate-post causes swelling of the hands. One instance is of a girl who detects her father-in-law putting something into her shoes after she is supposed to have gone to sleep. She burns the shoes and so avoids the trick; the shoes in burning make a noise like a bunch of fireworks. In another case a small red bag (presumably filled with occult miniatures) is fixed to the sole of the victim's foot. In one case a carving knife is conjured, supposing that the cook will be the first person to use it, but the charm goes astray because the seamstress has occasion to use the knife, and the charm goes from it to her. Some conjurers accomplish their ends by throwing hair balls at their victims.

"But charms seem to be most frequently conveyed by even more indirect means than those thus far enumerated. A baby is conjured by the presence in his crib of something all wrapped up in hair and all kinds of other queer looking things. The bundle when turned showed a strange variety of colors. A colored man got angry with a woman and tricked her by the following complicated charm. He took some blue cloth and cut out several chickens, and sewed them up after filling them with some kind of dust and a lot of needles and pins. He covered these with feathers so that they looked precisely like real chickens, and then sewed them up in his victim's bed. Conjure balls, snakes, and all kinds of reptiles are often found in the beds of those who have been 'conjured.' In other cases, the fatal bundle or bottle is secreted in some corner of the room in which the victim lives, or is placed in the road over which he oftenest walks. A charm in the shape of a small rubber ball may be placed in the chimney corner, or poison may

be put in a bottle and buried in the path (in some cases upside down). A sick woman, who had almost pined away to skin and bones, sent for a conjure-doctor. He went at once to the hearth, took up a brick, and found sticking in a cloth six pins and needles. He took them up, put salt on them, and threw them in the river. The needles and pins were said to be the cause of so many pains. In other cases poisonous balls of various sizes, filled with roots, herbs, and other mixtures, were put in the road. They could have no effect on any but the intended victim. These charms or tricks seem to have been made personal by securing something from the body of the victim, as a strand of hair, or some earth from his footprints.

"If you fail to get near enough to your victim to place the spell in his room or his hand or his bed or his path, you may yet, if you are skilful, succeed in carrying out your fell design by simply burying your charm under his doorstep or in his yard, where he may never see it, or come in contact with it, but where it will work untold evil to him and his; under the doorstep, if you can; near the house if you can't do that; but failing of this, almost anywhere in the yard will do if the spell is potent. A black bottle containing a liquid mixture, and nine pins and nine needles, is a favorite charm. Sometimes the charm is a bundle containing salt, pepper, and a silver five-cent piece; sometimes needles, pins, hairs, snake-heads. Again it is salt, red pepper, anvil dust, and a kind of root that conjure doctors always carry in their pockets. In the latter case, our informant tells us that 'when putting this down they have a ceremony and request the Devil to cause this to have the desired effect,' specifying in the request the part of the body of the victim which it is desired to injure. A small red flannel bag filled with pins, small tacks, and other things, and buried under a gate-sill made a horse refuse to enter the gate. After working over the horse for an hour, the driver looked under the sill, found the charm and removed it, and the horse walked quietly in at the gate. Jelly-fish taken out of the water, dried, powdered, and put into small bags are used for conjuring. In one case, when search was made for the charm, there was found in the ground a tin cup seven inches deep and three in diameter, called 'a conjure cup.' It contained little balls, some like lumps of tar, and some like sulphur and other different colors. When burned these balls gave 'beautiful blazes.' In one case a bottle full of snakes was buried by the doorstep. The first one who came out in the morning stepped over it and fell. A preserve jar found buried in one garden contained 'a snake and several other insects and something else wrapped up in cloth,' which the finder did not open but threw away. In one case, where there was reason to suspect conjuring, a bottle filled with roots, stones, and red-dish powder was found under the doorstep, and in the yard more bottles with beans, nails, and the same powder. The man burned them up and got well. Again, a package in the shape of a brick was found, and inside of it 'a tin trunk and a great many articulate creatures.' Another of our writers tells us that 'some of their simplest things are salt, pepper, pins, needles, black bottles, and all kinds of roots. I have seen one of their

roots which they called the "Devil's shoestring." It is a long, wiry-looking root, resembling the smallest roots of a potato-vine.'

"With this variety of gruesome and disgusting things did the plantation conjurers essay to work evil among the credulous people by whom they were surrounded. The next phase of our study is to inquire what were the evils laid to their door as the results of their dealing in roots, herbs, snakes, and mysteries.

"The disease which is caused by conjuring may be recognized in its early phases in the first place by the suddenness of the attack. The victim is seized with a sharp pain in some part of the body; later, swelling and other symptoms follow, but the beginning of the attack can usually be traced to a sharp pain which followed directly upon handling, stepping over, or swallowing the charm. Another, and perhaps the surest sign that the disease is the result of a spell or 'trick,' is that the patient grows worse rather than better under treatment of regular physicians. When this is the case it is well to call in a conjure-doctor at once, or it may be too late, for there are cases where even after the spell is removed the victim fails to recover from the injuries it has already wrought.

"As the disease develops itself the symptoms become more severe and terrible in their nature. In many cases snakes and lizards are seen running up and down under the flesh, or are even known to show their heads from the sufferer's mouth. One example is given of a woman possessed by a lizard that 'would run up and down her throat and hollow when she would be a-talking.' Another case is of a man whose food did him no good. The conjure-doctor told him that he had been conjured, and that inside of him were a number of small snakes which ate up the food as fast as he ate it. Another woman who had lizards crawling in her body was obliged to eat very often to keep the lizards from eating her. This possession by reptiles of various kinds seems to be a part in almost every evil wrought by the conjurer, and instances are too numerous and too horrible for a more detailed review of them in this paper. Sometimes when direct evidence of these reptiles fails to appear during the life of the patient, a post-mortem brings them to light and establishes the truth of the doctor's diagnosis.

"Another evidence that the disease is of a magical origin is in the strange noises made by the patient. Numerous instances are given of sufferers who howled or barked like dogs. One example is given of a woman who 'howled like a dog, crowed like a cock, barked like a fox, and mewed like a cat, and made all sorts of noises before she died.' One boy used to walk on all fours and howl like a dog. Another man who was conjured 'would have ways like a dog, growling and gritting his teeth.'

"From these symptoms it is but a brief step to insanity of all kinds, and many cases are cited where the insane patient is regarded as 'conjured' by his relative. One woman could not go further than a mile. 'When she had walked a mile she would get out of her head so she would have to stop, so she could gather her mind to go back.' A girl when conjured 'ran wild and drowned herself.' One woman 'was very sick and almost crazy, was

conjured to her bed for several months. And now she has some kind of spells that come upon her, when she lies like one dead for about an hour. She cannot bear any kind of medicine to be used about her. She says that she can hear all that is said to her but cannot speak.' It is unnecessary to cite all the instances given in the compositions. They are numerous enough to go far toward proving that insanity on the plantation was often laid to 'conjunction' and consequently took in the patient the form that the belief in conjunction would naturally give it, just as in New Testament times it was believed to be demoniacal possession and took that form in its manifestations.

(*To be continued.*)

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## NOTES AND QUERIES.

THE HISTORY OF AN ORDEAL. — The very interesting contribution to the folk-lore of Newfoundland, made by Rev. George Patterson, D. D., in the last number of this Journal (vol. viii. pp. 289, 290), not only supplies a most curious addition to a famous English ballad of the Middle Age, but also points out a general principle important for the comprehension of popular tradition. In describing the superstitions of the people on the coast, the writer cites the following anecdote, given on the authority of Judge Bennett of Harbor Grace: —

"The judge tells another good story illustrative of their superstition. Being at one of the outposts, a woman came to him complaining that some person had stolen a pair of blankets which she had washed and put out to dry, and wishing him to turn the key on the Bible to discover the thief. He refused, assuring her that he had no such power. But, as she continued to urge him, he proposed another plan.

"He asked if she had a good crowing bird. She said no, but her neighbor, Mrs. —, had. She of course had a large iron pot. He then directed her to summon all the men in the neighborhood to come to the house at dark. This was done; the rooster was caught and placed under the pot. When the men assembled the lamp was extinguished and they were sent outside. One man, whom the judge suspected as the guilty party, protested strongly against the proceeding, declaring his disbelief in any such idea as it involved. However, they were required in turn to go and touch the pot, the understanding being that when the guilty should do so the cock would crow. Each man went in and returned without the expected sign, and the man who had protested against the proceeding now appealed to the fact to show the folly of it. The judge, however, called them into the house, and the lamp being relit he remarked on the strangeness of the affair, and then called on all to hold up their hands, when it was found that the man's hands were clean, showing that he had never touched the pot at all. He at first attempted to deny his guilt, but on being threatened with being sent to jail he gave up his plunder."